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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the current status of the practicum as an element in programs for training educational administrators. The paper notes first that the value of individuals learning their craft by spending time in the field is generally accepted. A review of the literature found relatively little material describing the nature of the assumptions and beliefs attached to the practicum. Despite periodic calls for increased experimental learning in educational administration, the literature base remains small. The paper next describes a study of the research base related to the educational administration practicum. Research completed between 1971 and 1984 was examined. Of over 1,100 dissertations and 350 journal articles found on the subject of practica for educators, only 40 dealt with field-based practica in educational administration. Most of the research was done for doctoral dissertations, used survey questionnaires, and was aimed at problem-solving rather than at theory-testing. The research usually sought to develop models for experiential learning, though some studies evaluated models and others looked at individual features of practica. The paper concludes that much research needs to be done, but that there is a reasonable base from which to develop new research efforts. (PGD)

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THE PRACTICUM IN PREPARING EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS:
A STATUS REPORT

by

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THE PRACTICUM IN PREPARING EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS:
A STATUS REPORT

A widely-held and generally revered assumption that is implicit in the training and preparation programs utilized to assist individuals fulfill future professional roles is that a key ingredient should be participation in a period of apprenticeship, or some type of structured experiential learning. This belief in the importance of "learning by doing" has given birth to such respected practices as the residency and internship in medicine, the clerkship in law, clinical field placement in psychology and social work, and the internship in public administration. Clearly, this belief has also been embraced in professional education where the requirement for student teaching has become a universal expectation for those who wish to follow careers in classrooms. In addition, other positions in professional education, most notably those of the school administrator and supervisor, have also been viewed as ones wherein preservice preparation would be enhanced with opportunities for experiential learning that goes beyond the material covered in conventional university classes in school administration.

The emphasis on making use of field-based learning, or practica as the term will generally be referred to in this paper, as a vital part of educational administration training programs has been a rather consistent theme emphasized in periodic reform movements related to the improvement of leadership training practices. The general search for structure, legitimacy, and professionalization of educational administration as a field throughout the 1950's, for example, witnessed an accompanying search for more effective internship programs (Newell, 1956; Hooker, 1958). As studies and analyses of educational administration began to flourish and grow during the 1960's and 1970's, there continued to be periodic calls for the creation of more effective strategies to be utilized to assist aspiring administrators to learn their craft through the participation in realistic, job-like learning experiences (Culbertson and Hencley, 1962; Trump, et al.,

1970). In more recent years statements of educational reform have typically included assessments of the role of educational administrators as a critical factor in supporting more effective school practices. In turn, emphasis has generally increased on the need to require that administrators in training receive more effective and intensive learning experiences in the field through participation in practica. The recent work of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration has affirmed once again the longstanding belief in the value of experiential learning as a key to more effective preparation of school administrators (UCEA, 1986). In addition, state education agencies have increasingly endorsed the need for would-be administrators to learn about their future duties by spending more time in planned field experiences and other forms of practica. In the last 15 years, the number of states requiring some form of field experience as a part of initial administrative certification standards has increased from ten to 25 (Gousha, LoPresti, and Jones, 1986). The assumption that there is a value to be derived from engaging in practical, on-the-job learning experiences is clearly being endorsed by many.

Despite this relatively persistent emphasis on the need for the field experience or practicum to be utilized as an essential feature of educational administration training programs, however, there has been a remarkable lack of systematic recent study of this issue. Within the past few years, reviews by Iannaccone (1963), Griffiths and Moore (1967), and Derrick (1971) have focused on the promise of student teaching as a regular feature of preservice preparation for classroom instructors. By contrast, comprehensive treatments of the use of field-based training for educational administrators have been few and far between. The Cooperative Program for Educational Administration (CPEA) (Hooker, 1958), the Center for Applied Research in Education (Davies, 1962), and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) (Hencley, 1963) all engaged in work that has served as important milestones that provided comprehensive statements concerning the history, rationale, and common assumptions held for the practicum used to prepare school leaders. Comprehensive analyses of "learning by doing" for prospective school administrators have been virtually absent from the literature. Further, little has been written to

describe the nature of research activities in this arena.

Background of the Practicum in Education

One of the more succinct statements of the rationale for making use of practica in preparing educational personnel comes not from the field of educational administration, but rather from teacher education. Turney (1982) noted:

Ideally conceived the practicum is a powerful series of professional experiences in which student teachers apply, refine, and reconstruct theoretical learnings, and through which they develop their teaching competence. The practicum is an integral part of the programme of teacher education contributing to the achievement of its aims and closely related to its content competence.

This statement is directed specifically toward the world of initial training for classroom teachers, and may be criticized as being inappropriate for school administrators. The emphasis, for example, on the use of student teaching as a way to help people to "refine their teaching competence" is hardly comparable to the problem of finding a place for prospective administrators to "refine administrative skills" which are not similar to the tasks of teaching. Nevertheless, it appears that this rationale conceptually has some value to future school executives and their training by the use of a practica. It seems to make sense that an effective way to enable people to understand the linkage between theory learned in university courses and practice in "the real world" of schools is to require future administrators to spend some time working in a school, at least on a part-time basis, before going out into the job market for the first time. Once again, speaking from the perspective of teacher education, Turney (1982) noted a number of specific objectives to be addressed through a training practicum in professional education:

1. [It enables individuals] to test their commitment to ... a career ...;
2. ... to gain insight into the operation of a ... school, [its] goals and how they may be achieved;

3. ... to apply knowledge and skills gained through college studies in a practical setting;
4. ... to progressively develop ... competencies through participation in a range of practical experiences;
5. ... to evaluate progress and identify areas where further [personal and professional] development is needed.

At least the first four of these objectives appear to serve as foci for preservice practice required of aspiring administrators. The final goal, evaluation of progress and recommendation of specific areas for further development, does not appear to be a consistent theme found in the descriptions of educational administration training programs (Daresh and LaPlant, 1985). Another recent analysis of statements of rationale for practicum in educational administration by Daresh (1986) has shown that the literature has left little specific direction for understanding field-based training programs, other than the following rather general observations:

1. Field-based programs are valued as approaches to the training of educational administrators;
2. Participants in field-based programs typically report feelings of satisfaction with their experiences;
3. Although field-based programs are viewed as having great potential, attention is needed to ensure that they are indeed high quality learning experiences where participants are exposed to desirable and exemplary practice.

Rationale for the Current Study

As it was noted earlier, the majority of recent descriptions of the practicum in educational training has been based in the area of teacher preparation. In fact, one of the few attempts during the past few years to provide an analysis of the state of experiential learning for prospective school administrators was completed by Pedicone (1983) who reviewed programs provided as a part of administrative training at 19 universities. His work, a look only at formal internships, consisted primarily in the analysis of structural components of programs that were offered in large,

doctoral-granting institutions. Most other recent published descriptions of the administrative preparation practicum have tended to consist of descriptions of particular programs (Trump, et al., 1970; Barrilleaux, 1972; Erlandson, 1979), or evaluations of the concept of experience-based learning in rather general terms (Sweeney, 1980; Onks, 1981; Aidala, 1982; Orton, 1986). In short, the literature has left little specific direction for assisting in increasing the understanding of field-based training programs. As a result of this apparent lack of a research or conceptual base related to the practicum in educational administration preparation programs, the review described in this paper was carried out to assist in the development of additional insights into the field.

Review Methodology

The current state of knowledge regarding the practicum as part of preservice administrative training might best be described as a case of accepting an idea that seems to "make sense," but one which does not have a substantial amount of valid data upon which it is possible to draw any strong support. It is possible to discern, from numerous observations concerning the desirability of encouraging practice in several professional fields, to identify underlying assumptions for experiential learning. It is also possible to note several extremely interesting internships and planned field experience programs that have been utilized as parts of administrator preparation in a number of different settings. What is not clear at present is the status of research conducted recently on the practicum in educational administration training programs. Without a clear view of this present condition, charting a path for future investigations is nearly impossible, and the knowledge base concerning this important topic may be doomed to the pursuit of the same tired issues over and over again.

During the past several months, a systematic review of existing research on the practicum in educational administration preparation has been carried out. This review has been but one of several ongoing activities of the UCEA Center on Field Relations in Educational Administration Training Programs, a project jointly sponsored by the

University Council for Educational Administration, The Ohio State University, and the University of Cincinnati. Its purpose has been to investigate the nature of relationships between universities across the United States and Canada and local education agencies to provide for the preservice training of school administrators. The review has been funded largely through support from the Office of Research and Development of the College of Education at The Ohio State University.

The purpose of the review presented in this paper was to determine the current status of research relative to the following questions:

1. How have issues related to the practicum in educational administration preservice training programs typically been studied?
2. What have been the predominant purposes and most frequent findings of the existing research?

These questions were explored as a way to help increase the understanding of what is currently known so that better direction may be provided for future researchers.

Research completed between 1971 and 1984 was included in this review. The goal was to increase the knowledge based related to research on the educational administration practicum through the preparation of an integrative review, or a review of research "primarily interested in inferring generalizations about substantive issues from a set of studies directly bearing on these issues" (Jackson, 1980, p. 438). The need to engage in this type of review is described as important and necessary to the mapping of and eventual development of a scholarly field (Light and Smith, 1971) because the educational administration practicum, as is also true of many other practices utilized in education, suffers from a lack of "systematic efforts to accumulate information from a set of studies" (Jackson, 1980, p. 439).

Reports of recent research were sought from two sources. First, Dissertation Abstracts International (Humanities and Social Sciences) was reviewed from 1971 to 1984. In all, more than 1,100 dissertations dealing with internships, practica, clinical-based instruction, experiential learning, student teaching, administrative preparation programs using planned field experiences, and other similar related topics were found.

Thirty-four of these dealt specifically with the practicum for preparing educational administrators. Second, 30 different journals in professional education (Appendix I) were reviewed for the same time frame. More than 350 articles were located concerning experiential-based preparation programs for educators. However, fewer than 50 of these articles were directed toward administrative training, and only six items could properly be classified as descriptions of research conducted on the field-based practicum for educational administration. In total, 40 studies served as the basis for this review.

How have issues related to the practicum been studied?

Three kinds of information were sought in response to this question. First, predominant research designs were noted. Next, data collection procedures were identified. Third, whether each study was directed toward solving some educational problem, or based on theory was determined.

Research design. The most popular research design for studies of educational administration practice was the descriptive survey. In fact, all but six of the studies reviewed made use of this design. Other strategies employed included quasi-experimental treatments in three cases, and "action research" designs for two studies. One investigation made use of a correlational design, but there were no historical or true experimental studies. The studies classified as "action research" were mostly descriptions of how local internship programs were developed. This would seem to support Hopkins' (1983) view that this approach should more properly be classified as curriculum development and not research at all.

Data collection procedures. Most studies made use of only one data collection technique, and the favored technique was the questionnaire, typically an instrument designed for use in only one specific study.

Problem-solving v. Theory-based. Research may be directed toward the solving of some specific educational concerns or problems, or it can be theory based. If it is the latter, it may be specifically designed to test the constructs or assumptions of some identified theory, or it may be proposed as a way to lay the groundwork for the development and building of new theory. The majority of the research directed toward the practicum in

educational administration preparation programs is atheoretical and directed toward problem solving.

After reviewing the methodologies used in existing research on the educational administration preservice practicum, the following are conclusions that can be reached concerning "how" this topic has normally been studied:

1. The topic of the practicum in educational administration preparation programs has not served as the focus of much systematic research over the years, despite its apparent importance as a tool for training future leaders.
2. The majority of research conducted on the practicum has been through doctoral dissertations. Thus, this issue is not different from many other ill-studied issues in education.
3. Widely-disseminated professional education journals contain few reports of original research on the practicum in educational administration preparation.
4. Most recent studies which have been conducted have been descriptive surveys using questionnaires.
5. There is a virtual absence of theory-based research in this area.

What have been the purposes and findings of the research?

This review was also designed to answer the questions, "Toward what objectives was the research directed?" and "What was found?" Completed research tended to fall into one of three of the following general categories: Development of a model for a practicum in educational administration, model evaluation, or the assessment of selected structural components of practice. Not surprisingly, some studies could be viewed as representatives of more than one of these categories. Despite such occasional distortions, however, it was possible to determine the general pattern of purpose for the studies that were reviewed.

Model development. The largest single group of studies described the development of a local model for providing experiential learning opportunities for aspiring school administrators. In all cases, the model was linked to a formal university-based educational administration graduate

program.

It is difficult to generalize from the findings of these studies due to the idiosyncratic nature of the models that were described in the research reports. However, it was possible to note some similarities present in terms of the ways in which these models "fit" educational administration programs. For example:

1. The models that were developed were almost exclusively defined as full-time, paid internships. Other forms of practica such as planned field experiences or short-term field projects were not described.
2. The models that were developed were designed to serve as components of administrative preparation programs for the most part. In only one case was it apparent that the practicum was viewed as a normal part of the graduate academic degree requirements for a program in educational administration, and not some add-on course for those who were seeking administrative credentials.

Model evaluation. Overlaps clearly existed between studies classified as examples of model development and model evaluation. The typical example of this latter group was a study wherein researchers contacted recent participants in a university-based internship (rarely any other model) and asked if the experience had been successful. Predictably, the usual response was that the program was very valuable. In a few cases, individuals other than former interns were also contacted to determine their perceptions of the value of a particular intern program. Once again, the response from such actors as university supervisors, field mentors, and teachers in schools where interns worked normally indicated praise for the intern program. Thus, the assumption in most examples of "model evaluation" studies was that the practica "worked."

Analysis of structural components. The remainder of studies which did not focus on specific models of internships or practica looked at individual features of such efforts, such as the adequacy of funding, length of time, and so forth. Some of the general conclusions reached from this set of studies were:

1. The biggest hindrance to the maintenance of internship programs as

part of administrative preparation programs is that they are expensive.

2. There is widespread agreement that internships are worthwhile, however.
3. The belief that the practicum is a valuable part of administrator training was confirmed.
4. It is difficult to encourage educational administration students to voluntarily participate in internships or other forms of practica, particularly if those students are not full-time students in graduate programs.
5. Institutions employing interns like these individuals because they represent "cheap labor."

Summary Observations

The status of recent research on the practicum in educational administration preparation programs is that the field is not currently supplied with an abundance of high quality investigation. Most work is without any theoretical base, looks at only local issues, is confined largely to internships, and does nothing to look at the long-term developmental characteristics of the practicum. It is indeed frustrating to make these observations when there is clearly a trend toward increasing the importance of the role that field-based practica will have in preparing educational leaders.

Suggestions for the Future

The primary purpose of this paper was to review "what is" and not dwell on "what should be." Still, it is impossible not to include some suggested directions that might be followed with regard to future research activities related to the practicum in educational administration preparation practica.

In one way, the development of a future research agenda in this field is not one which needs complete invention. There is a sizable research base extant, in the field of student teaching, and some of the issues

explored through that medium might be appropriate for extension to the world of administrative preparation as well. For example, there have been numerous studies which have focused on the relationship between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. The assumption, of course, is that such a relationship is an important part of the learning process for the neophyte teacher who needs to come in contact with someone of greater experience. It is surprising to note that the recent studies of the administrative practicum have ignored any analysis of the characteristics of effective mentors for administrative practice. There appears to be an assumption that just about any administrator in the role of the "old hand in the field" is good enough for the aspiring administrator to observe. It seems to be of little wonder, therefore, that some undesirable administrative practices are perpetuated for generations. Who is critically examining the paths that future leaders are taught to follow?

Future research on the educational administration practicum might also borrow from studies of student teachers by examining the issue of impact of the practicum on the professional development of the student/candidate. Do people learn as a result of spending time in the field? There is such tremendous assumed value in the concept of "learning by doing" that we may be ignoring an obvious researchable issue to test that fundamental assumption. In addition, studies of impact may also be fruitful ways of introducing a theory base into the research that will be conducted. There are numerous conceptual bases regarding human growth and development, for example, that may lend their constructs to the type of scrutiny by researchers that is currently absent.

The issue of impact might also be studied from the perspective of the institution which serves as the host for the practicum candidate. Does the presence of such an individual have any discernable effect on such issues as the work flow of a school, its psycho-social climate, or the communication patterns that exist? Studies of student teachers often look at whether or not the pupils in the student teacher's classes are learning. Is it not possible to ask basically the same question concerning the impact of an aspiring administrator on the quality of organizational life in a school or district?

Future research also needs to be contemplated in the area of reviewing

the long term impact of the practicum on eventual career success of candidates. As long as most research is conducted by doctoral students who need to complete their dissertations as quickly as possible, the likelihood is slim of true longitudinal studies which track the ways in which individuals' professional lives are shaped after participating in a practicum. But, studies of this sort need to be conducted to answer the simple question, "Does it make a difference to participate in a practicum?"

Studies also are needed to look at the ways in which conventional training programs to prepare administrators at universities are in fact enhanced through the continued existence of planned field experiences, internships, and other forms of practice. Is there any real reliance on the concept of "learning by doing" by university faculties? More bluntly stated, do university faculties truly trust their colleagues in the field to the point that they believe learning can take place outside of university lecture halls? If there is a true valuing of the practicum, in what ways do university programs reflect that value?

In line with the issue of impact of field-based learning programs on universities, one might also wish to examine the extent to which institutions of higher education really support experiential learning. Are professors in charge of such program recognized for their contribution to the field of administrative preparation, or are they in fact penalized by their institutions for not doing something "more important" such as carrying out research, rather than working with and in the field? One must obviously consider the fact that, if faculty participation in field programs is viewed as a "throw-away" duty, it is unlikely that major program improvements can be made in this area. Clearly, this might raise yet another issue concerning the reasons why research in the area of administrator training is not often viewed as an area deserving scholarly attention.

Finally, one would suggest that future analyses of the practicum in educational administration preparation programs be expanded to include studies of a wider range of experiences than the formal internship alone. Perhaps even more frustrating than the limitations of method that were noted in the earlier review of extant research was the fact that "learning by doing" for administrators is so narrowly defined as the full-time, paid

internship. Most individuals being prepared for future administrative positions are not able to take the amount of time that is necessary for such an experience. One might argue whether or not this is desirable; it is, however, fact at present. However, there are opportunities to learn in the field without taking on a full-time internship, the type of program most often studied. There are short-term field experiences, field based and clinical courses, field projects, and doubtless many other activities that are frequently used as a way to "bridge the gap" between theory and practice. The research on these activities is virtually non-existent. Perhaps a prelude to such investigations would be a serious clarification of the terms which are utilized to describe learning in the field. Internships are one thing, planned field experiences are different, and some would argue that practica are yet a totally different model. A first step in the process of building a long-term research agenda might simply to define the terms of what one should be studying.

Summary

This paper has presented a brief review of the current status of the practicum as part of educational administration preparation programs. First, it was noted that there is a general acceptance of the face value of individuals learning their craft by spending time in the field. Next, it was indicated that there has been relatively little found in the literature that truly describes the nature of the assumptions and beliefs that are attached to the practicum. There have been periodic statements and calls for the increase of opportunities for people to learn about administration in field settings. The literature base in educational administration, however, is not nearly as rich as the one in teacher education. Third, the existing research base related to the educational administration practicum was reviewed, and definite limitations were noted in both the ways in which this topic has been studied, and what has been found. In response to this issue, the final part of the paper listed some possible directions that might be followed in a systematic research agenda for the future.

Much of what has been presented here presents a less-than positive view of the status of research on the practicum. On the other hand, it

might be comforting to note that we are not alone in this problem. Physicians and lawyers have long made the same assumptions about the need to learn in realistic settings. During the same years reviewed for this paper, only two studies were located to test the assumptions of experiential learning in those fields. This observation is not made to excuse our own lack of scientific investigation by stating that, "It's okay since doctors don't do it, either." What needs to take place, in light of the public's increasing interest in the quality of professional education and preparation programs for all professions, is serious and systematic attention to learning how people learn to do their jobs better. Such a goal is much more important than simply studying the same issues regarding internships over and over again.

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APPENDIX I

Professional Education Journals Reviewed

Action in Teacher Education
Administrator's Notebook
Alberta Journal of Education
American Educational Research Journal
Australian Journal of Education
British Journal of Teacher Education
Capstone Journal of Education
Catalyst for Change
Contemporary Education
Education
Education Canada
Educational Administration Quarterly
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Research Quarterly
Educational Technology
Elementary School Journal
High School Journal
Journal of Educational Administration
Journal of Research and Development in Education
Journal of Teacher Education
NASSP Bulletin
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Planning and Changing

Principal
Review of Educational Research
Secondary Education Today
Teacher Educator
Theory Into Practice
UCEA Review